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THE HEBREW "WISDOM."

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The term *wisdom* in Hebrew study corresponds to the term philosophy in Greek and other profane study.

Did the Hebrews have a philosophy? Yes, undoubtedly.

But what definition does this answer require us to attach to the term philosophy? This: Philosophy is the love of wisdom which manifests itself in an earnest endeavor to find a theoretical or practical solution of the problems of our earthly life and environment. The attempted solution is either theoretical or practical, according to the nature of the problem investigated.

It is not necessary, in order that it may be called philosophy, that the inquiry should be conducted in a scholarly, scientific method, according to the rigid laws of logic. In this case, it would be a species of philosophy, it is true; but it would not be philosophy the genus. Otherwise, it could not be said that the Hebrews had a philosophy. They had no developed systems. Conclusions mainly are stated.

The Greek philosophy inquired into the nature of God, the nature of man, the origin of the world, and the origin of evil; giving us not only conclusions, but also the processes whereby the conclusions are reached. It also discussed the relation of God to man, and of man to God, and of man to his fellow man. It was therefore ethical, to a certain extent, in its character.

For what purpose was I made? How shall this purpose be realized? Is it to be realized by myself for myself, or by another for me? How long shall I exist? And the mystery of suffering?

With all these questions the Hebrew "wisdom," or philosophy, also dealt, though largely in their ethical and practical aspects.

The Hebrew was a man, and as such he was obliged to be a philosopher; otherwise he could not have been the recipient of a revelation, whether natural or supernatural. No man can hear unless he listens. No man can see unless he looks. The Hebrews heard and saw. This proves that they listened and looked. Every language has a "why" in it, and a "whence," and a "whither;" and these are the essential categories of philosophy. The fact that the Hebrew belonged to the Semitic race gave a peculiar cast to his philosophy;

but it certainly did not make him any the less a philosopher. His philosophy may, at the same time, have been poetry of some sort. But that was only its accident ; it was none the less philosophy. It inquired. It answered. And in the longer dramas and epico-dramas there was a central thought and a process. Nor did one Hebrew believe this, and another that. The state of thought among them was not altogether chaotic. Many dogmas and ethical precepts were held in common. So that an inquiry into the Hebrew philosophy is only an inquiry whether the Hebrews asked such and such questions, and how they answered them.

But not only did the fact that the Hebrew belonged to the Semitic race influence his philosophy. So also did his physical, political and social environments ; nor does it make any difference, so far as this matter is concerned, whether the conclusions of his philosophy were natural or supernatural revelations. Everything that made him a Hebrew, whether in his inner or outer aspects, went also to make up his philosophy. Had the Greek been the vehicle through whom the philosophic contents of that which we call the Bible were revealed, the Bible would have been a very different book from what it is. The Greek's language and habits of thought were different ; his pursuits and all his surroundings were different. Nor was there ever a David in Athens or Rome, or a Solomon, or Samuel, or Moses. Hebrew men made Hebrew history ; and history is often both the basis and the frame-work of philosophy, whether the philosophy be a supernatural revelation or not.

The philosophy of the Hebrews is not to be looked for merely in the so-called Wisdom Books. To affirm the contrary is to imply a theory of inspiration which is not generally held even by the most orthodox. If the writers of the Wisdom Books reflected and inquired, so did the writers of the others. Even the strictly historical books are the embodiment of a teaching. They imply that the people held certain beliefs. The writers of none of them were mere pens. The first chapter of Genesis is called a cosmogony even by those who deny that the Hebrews had a philosophy. It is an account of the origin of the world. Was it a supernatural revelation ? If so, whoever wrote it down was the conscious medium of the revelation. That is to say, he was not a mere amanuensis. He thought ; and he thought on the subject of which he was writing. He inquired, and wrote down the answers as they were presented to his mind. No matter how they were presented. It is a divine cosmogony ; but it is also a "Mosaic cosmogony." Of course, it could not be called a philosophy, had there not been a previous inquiry on the part of the writer ; and the only

reason why it may not be called so in the fuller sense of the term, is because only the answer is recorded, and not also the inquiry and the logical steps whereby the answer is reached.

Whence came this world, with its dry land and its seas, its animal and its vegetable life, its sun and moon and stars? And how? And for what purpose?

How long the question was before the answer, we know not. But it continued to be asked, and there was as often a response of some sort. To deny it is to deny that there was a capability in man to receive the revelation of the great answer which came in due time:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, etc., etc.

No matter whether it be a poem or a prose account, whether inspired in any sense or uninspired in every sense, it is as good an answer as any other, and, so far as it goes, is just as truly a philosophy because of the human element that is in it, and that underlies it, as that of any ancient or modern speculator on the same subject. "It has thoroughly refuted the theory of two eternal principles, of the eternity of matter," and "has established that one profound, all-pervading view of the world which rests upon the living synthesis of the ideal and real, upon the assumption of the absolute personality."

It is not my purpose in this very brief paper to discuss the contents, in their philosophical aspects, of the Mosaic and subsequent "historical books" of the Hebrews, but simply to affirm two propositions:

I. That there is much in the Hebrew writings which is indisputably entitled to be called philosophy.

II. That an exhaustive analysis of the Hebrew philosophy would require an examination of something more than the mere Wisdom Books of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.

In order that we may know what was the view of the Hebrew people on any of the great questions of philosophy, whether theological or anthropological, upon which all men must needs think more or less, it is necessary for us to discriminate between those beliefs which were indigenous to the Hebrew mind and those which were gradually instilled into it through the agency of inspired men. The Hebrew doctrine of man, for example, in its various phases, must be sought partly in the etymology of the various Hebrew terms used to designate him; partly in the uninspired statements concerning him; and partly in the teachings of inspired prophets. And the view held by the prophet on many questions was not infrequently the very view which was not held by the people.

But the Hebrew "Wisdom," in the narrower and more technical sense of the term, excludes the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament, and is found only in the inspired meditations of the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms. We may have something to say, concerning each of these, in future numbers of the STUDENT.

ORIGIN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT RELIGION.

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I I.

The peculiar genius of the Semitic race, with its predisposition to religion, and the peculiar genius of the Semitic religion, with its predisposition to the Old Testament type; such is the natural basis on which the religion of the Old Testament rests, and such the historic conditions which made its revelation possible. But, it may be asked, Do not these conditions explain all? Is it not conceivable that the spiritual monotheistic faith of the Old Testament was derived genetically, by natural evolution, from this antecedent Semitic faith? Is the hypothesis of a supernatural revelation at all necessary to account for its origin?

In reply, we remark that there are elements in the higher religion that are in no way derivable from the lower. They may resemble each other in outward type; in inner life and spirit they are totally dissimilar. The one furnishes the mould in which the other is run; but the mould is of the earth, while the pure metal that fills it and receives its shape from it, is of heaven.

Take, for instance, the conception of God. If we should regard the unity of God as the distinctive feature of the Old Testament conception, it would be unreasonable to place an impassable chasm between it and the old Semitic conception of the national God. The idea of the one God for the whole world might justly be viewed as only a further extension and development of the idea of the one god for a single nation. It is not, however, the unity, abstractly considered, but the entire character of this one God, as living, super-mundane and personal, that distinguishes Old Testament religion from the ancient Semitic, as well as from all other heathen religions. Heathenism has never been able to rise to the idea of the absolute, yet personal God. It cannot penetrate behind the powers of the world, and see Him, the